

Conservation Commission and Conservation Department Fiscal Year 2002

Conservation projects in Amherst continue to enjoy enthusiastic public support and generous volunteer efforts. Conservation properties and restricted farmlands help maintain the Town's rural atmosphere; support farming as a viable source of produce and jobs; protect wildlife, flora, and diverse ecological habitats; provide "backyards" to everyone for recreation and aesthetic enjoyment; protect the water supply and water quality, and buffer development.

Town conservation lands now total 1,965 acres; another 1,842 acres of Amherst farmlands are protected by Agricultural Preservation Restrictions and 167 acres, by Conservation Restrictions. The Town has benefited over the years from generous gifts of land, money, and time from many public-spirited individuals concerned with land preservation.

This year, the Town purchased from Richard Slobody a Conservation Restriction over a beautiful 10-acre field near the corner of Station Road and South East Street, with panoramic views of the Pelham hills. The purchase package for this Restriction included the sale of two house lots, a grant from the Massachusetts Self-Help program, contributions from the Kestrel Trust and Valley Land Fund, and private funds. Thanks are extended to Christopher Small, James Scott, Jeanne Esposito, and many others for their help in securing this Restriction.

The Town also purchased a 37-acre wooded parcel in Pelham from Willem vanPelt, adjacent to land already owned by Amherst in the watershed of its three Pelham reservoirs, which together supply about 25 percent of Amherst's water supply. Sixty percent of the cost came from a grant from the State Aquifer Land Acquisition Program.

The Conservation Commission, composed of Marion Hoffman, Rob Kusner, Francesca Maltese, Arthur Mange (Chair), William Masalski, Barbara Mitchell, and Mally O'Hare, handled many wetland cases this year, including violations of wetlands regulations, quarrels among neighbors, disagreements about perennial versus intermittent stream flows, and disputes over resource area boundaries. For example, the Commission's delineation of wetlands near a proposed affordable housing project by HAP on Longfellow Drive was upheld after appeal to DEP by the Neighborhood Orchard Valley Association. Still in litigation at this time, at both the state and local levels, is the Commission's delineation of the floodplain on a low-lying parcel near Meadow Street and Route 116. The Commission is grateful for the expert interpretation and execution of complex rules and regulations by Wetlands Administrator Stephanie Ciccarello and Office Manager Bridget Davis.

Arthur served as the Commission's representative to the Community Preservation Act Committee. This Committee is charged with recommending how to spend about \$200,000, in FY 03, in the areas of conservation, agricultural land protection, affordable housing, historic preservation, and recreation. In this regard, we are concerned with a number of parcels adjacent to existing protected land, some of which will be exposed to development by the extension of Town sewers.

Stephanie Ciccarello served as Town Energy Conservation Coordinator. She worked 8 hours a week helping the Town's Climate Protection working group assemble energy consumption data and other information that will lead to a Town Climate Protection Plan. Amherst College,

Hampshire College, and the University of Massachusetts have participated actively in these discussions, and the two colleges each contributed much-needed funds to pay for the 8 hours of staff assistance. Ariele Foster, our Climate Protection intern, funded by the ICLEI Cities for Climate Protection program, began this work by carrying out a comprehensive survey of energy use throughout all sectors of the Town and college community.

Conservation Land Manager Tammy Ciesla and many seasonal trail crew members and pond caretakers carried out a wide range of field work during the year. The Robert Frost Trail received a major re-routing through the Lawrence Swamp to avoid areas flooded by beaver, and preparations were made for new work on the Town's present wheelchair-accessible trails at Larch Hill and Upper Mill River, and for the addition of new accessible trails as soon as funds are available. Parking areas and driveways at Mt. Pollux, Amethyst Brook, and the north beach at Puffer's Pond were paved, and the Heartland Farm portion of the Town's Station Road Farm complex received significant upgrading from farm manager Diana Adair, with help from the state's Agricultural Enhancement Program. The federally funded Amherst-UMass Bikeway Connector, a 1.6-mile paved trail from the Norwottuck Rail Trail to Massachusetts Avenue on the UMass campus, was completed thanks to oversight from a joint University-Town advisory committee chaired by Arthur Swift.

With help from generous local donations, the Town also completed a new conservation maintenance building at the Cherry Hill Golf Course complex on Route 63. The move allowed the Hitchcock Center for the Environment at Larch Hill to expand into the new North Room, which is now available as a public meeting and teaching room.

Trail volunteers continued to provide valuable assistance with the management of the Town's 80-mile trail system (with links to more than 10 adjacent towns). Town residents Norman and Sabina Cournoyer made a significant challenge contribution to the trail management fund, many others also contributed to the trail effort, and the Department began plans to create a Literary Trail System, with trails in the complex to receive names honoring past and present authors and poets with Amherst connections.

Arthur Mange, Conservation Commission Chair
Pete Westover, Conservation Director